

## **TOURISM GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES ON MAFIA ISLAND**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The main purpose of the Millennium Challenge Compact (MCC) is to reduce poverty by stimulating economic growth, increasing household incomes, and raising the quality of life through targeted infrastructure investments.

Upgrading the Mafia Island airport is one of the infrastructure development projects under the MCC agreement. The main access to Mafia has been by sea or by air for the few people that can manage the cost. The poor state of the existing airport, the absence of a real harbor, and poor condition of the sea vessels has made these options unreliable and unsafe. Poor and inadequate transportation has negatively affected Mafia Island development for many years.

MCC funding will help refurbish the runway, apron, and taxiway; establish and secure airport boundaries, refurbish the fire station, terminal building, and its water supply; and install communication facilities. By undertaking these changes, the safety and security of the airport will be enhanced and the airport will be able to handle 16 aircrafts of the type of ATR 72 in 12 hours or 100 arriving or departing passengers per hour. Translated otherwise, this is about one airplane landing and taking off every 1.5 hours. The improvements would also provide electricity to allow planes to land and take off at night. The final passenger handling capacity at the terminal building however, may change to about 40 passengers per hour, but still this would not imply significant changes to the design and the overall implications to increased economic and social development activities in Mafia.

The aim of MCA-T in financing the airport upgrade is to stimulate economic growth in Mafia and the country in general. The

economic activities that may be stimulated by the changes include agriculture, tourism, livestock keeping, communication and information, fisheries and may have implications on social services such as schools, health and water supply.

Mafia has become an important tourist destination, serving a global tourism market with links to Zanzibar and several destinations on mainland Tanzania. The flow of passengers, aircraft movement, and cargo freight to or from Mafia has changed in recent years, indicating a growth in travel and businesses between Mafia and outside ports. For example, aircraft movements have increased by 30 percent from 1,290 in 1999 to 2,746 in 2007. Cargo freight started in 2003 with 1,640 kg and reached 116,915 kg in 2007. Passengers increased from 6,609 in 1999 to 13,240 in 2007. The Tanzania Airport Authority is projecting an increase in cargo, passengers, and aircraft movement in the next ten years to about 318,084 kg, 40,951 passengers, and 6,567 aircraft movements respectively. These projections might increase even further by 2030, to about 1.4 million kg of cargo and about 180,000 passengers<sup>1</sup>.

### **ISSUES**

Mafia Island is rich in biodiversity, including a variety of fish species, prawns and octopus. Fishing is an important economic activity engaging many people on the island and fishermen from other areas of Tanzania. Most of the important fish species beside the octopus have been over-exploited. Mafia Island is also rich in large wildlife resources.

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<sup>1</sup> These projections were made before the world financial crisis. This crisis has caused many potential tourists to cancel their planned trips, thus reducing the arrival figures.

For example, two species of toad and gecko that occur nowhere else in the world, as well as large fruit bats (flying foxes) are found in Mafia. Other resources found in Mafia include land, people and archaeological sites that are important for tourism development on the Island.

Growing tourist arrivals will stimulate demand and provide incentives for the construction of more tourism-related facilities (e.g. lodges, resorts, hotels, diving centers, other services) and could increase visitor density and circulation on the island. In addition, it may also increase economic activity, and promote social interactions (and tensions) between local populations, visitors and migrant workers. The cumulative impacts arising from the various economic activities in Mafia following the airport upgrade could increase the pressure on land, water, energy, and the demand for food production. Additionally, it could generate more waste and stimulate positive or negative changes on social and cultural issues.

Currently, Mafia's rich biodiversity is threatened by increased pressure on these resources amidst weak natural resources management, increased poverty and limitations on financial and human resources for conservation. It is against this background that the MCC/MCA-T initiated a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for Mafia Island in view of the potential increase in economic activities following upgrading of the Mafia airport. The aim of the SEA was to provide a long-term planning framework for Mafia Island that will help MCC and the Government of Tanzania prioritize strategic policy options that could guide development efforts in Mafia. The changes may affect the tourism sector. Therefore, the following policy recommendations are provided in order to minimize the effect of expanded economic growth in Mafia.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### *1. REDUCE NUMBER OF VISITORS PER DAY*

Initial airport expansion is aimed at reaching a capacity of 100 passengers per hour or about 16 ATR 72 planes every 1.5 hours on a 12-hour day). By 2007, about 40 passengers were arriving in Mafia daily (or 13,240 per annum). There are about 78 rooms in all the existing eight lodges, hotels, and guesthouses in Mafia. While the number of daily arrivals is smaller than the number of available rooms, Mafia is often overstretched during peak seasons, a problem that is often compounded by poor booking systems.

The proposed scale of visitors per day has been reduced down to 40 passengers per hour (or about 480 passengers on a 12-hour day). This translates to about seven ATR 72 plane movements per day or about one plane every 1.7 hours. The interval between plane landings could be extended if night landings are also considered. According to the initial plans for expansion of the airport, this level of passengers (i.e. 40 per hour) was to be reached in 2030

Despite these changes, the potential environmental impact from increased numbers of visitors is likely to be significant. Therefore, it is important to consider reducing the number of visitors to almost half of the projected daily arrivals in order to reduce environmental pressures. However, reducing the arrival numbers will also have a negative impact on projected revenue generation for the airlines, Tanzania Airports Authority, hoteliers, Tanzania Revenue Authority and local communities. This matter requires strategic policy decisions, while taking into account long-term environmental and economic benefits, rather than simply looking at short-term economic gains. Environmental management based on sustainable resource use may guarantee more revenues and benefits in the long term.

## ***2. IMPROVE EXISTING FACILITIES AND LIMIT DEVELOPMENT OF NEW LODGES, HOTELS AND FACILITIES***

In order to address the effect of constructing more lodges and other structures, thereby exacerbating pollution and land use problems, strategic policy options should be undertaken to ensure that existing facilities are improved to a level that meets international standards before new facilities are built. This initiative must be implemented in tandem with general efforts to promote land use planning and to encourage high-value, low-volume tourism.

Currently Mafia has eight tourist facilities, including four high cost facilities at Utende and Chole and middle and budget tourism facilities in other areas. Plans are underway to build five new additional facilities along the seashore, and some investors have targeted the small islands that serve as marine breeding sites. The construction of new facilities should await the preparation of the land use plans, which would determine proper areas and numbers of additional facilities, if they are needed at all. The government should consider economic incentives that could motivate hotel owners to improve existing facilities and services to protect the environment and tourist resources.

## ***3. DIVERSIFY ATTRACTIONS***

The main tourist attractions in Mafia have been a variety of activities including SCUBA diving, snorkeling, swimming, sport fishing, sailing, windsurfing, and visits to cultural sites and Mlola Forest. Although the coral reefs of Mafia offer some of the best snorkeling and SCUBA diving opportunities in East Africa, visitation has been low. From 1997–2007, occupancy rates have remained within the average of 30 percent. The main cause for this low occupancy rate has been poor transport, poor facilities and lack of diversification that would retain tourism for more days on the island.

Alongside improvement of existing facilities, MDC and Ministry of Natural Resources

and Tourism (MNRT) should identify new attractions and improve their accessibility. For example, Mafia is famous for historical and cultural sites, yet most have not been preserved or made accessible to visitors. The historical sites I Ras Kisimani, Kua in Juani, some historical sites in Chole and in Utende are not developed to attract tourism. In addition, the Swahili culture, which is rich in diversity and attraction as depicted by the local people, has presents many opportunities for cultural tourism.

The MNRT is undertaking wider promotion of Mafia as a destination. Diversifying attractions could increase revenues and reduce pressure on the marine resources that have been the source of attraction for many years.

## ***4. ENHANCE TOURISM VALUE CHAIN BY IMPROVING LINKAGES WITH LOCAL ECONOMY***

Tourism has existed on Mafia since at least the 1950s, in the form of the Mafia Island Game Fishing Club at Utende. However, tourism has had a very limited impact in Mafia due to weak linkages with the local economy. The MNRT and MDC should strengthen the tourism value chain by linking tourism development with other segments of the economy (e.g., provision of goods and services, employment generation). Some segments would directly benefit local communities by integrating their economic activities with tourism markets.

Similarly, the Government should consider putting in place policies that would encourage hoteliers to buy local products. MDC should encourage local people to produce commodities that meet tourism demands.